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CONTRA SUPPLIERS REPORTEDLY GOT U.S. MILITARY HELP

J By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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WASHINGTON, April 24 — The Congressional committees looking into the Iran-contra affair have found evidence that American military personnel in Central America actively helped the resupply operation for the contras despite a Congressional ban on such aid, an official familiar with the investigation said today.

The assistance included refueling for planes used by the private supply program and storing weapons and ammunition in American military warehouses, the investigator said.

There was no indication, however, that the officers and enlisted men who provided the aid did so under orders from Washington. Instead, they are said to have acted out of a belief widely held among American military and Government personnel in the region that they were carrying out a policy established by President Reagan.

In addition, lawmakers have now traced the origin and use of almost all the money involved in the covert operations, except for a \$10 million donation reportedly made by the Sultan of Brunei, according to an official knowledgeable about the investigation.

Mistake in Account Number

The investigators have concluded that the Sultan's money may have been accidentally deposited in the wrong, Swiss bank account because of a possible error by Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, in transmitting the account number. Mr. Abrams has acknowledged that he was given the number of the secret account at Crédit Suisse in Geneva by Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, the former National Security Council staff member.

A senator who did not want to be identified said today that the amount of money diverted from the Iranian arms sales to the contra supply program was in the millions of dollars, but was probably less than previous estimates, which ranged from \$8 million to \$30 million.

than cash, making the original amounts spent uncertain. Staff members of the Congressional committees are still calculating a total figure for the diversion.

Discussing the President's role in the case, the senator said evidence showed that Mr. Reagan was even more closely involved in the efforts to free Americans held hostage by pro-Iranian terrorists in Lebanon than the Tower Commission report had indicated.

"He was really engaged and informed and active," the senator said. "He was anguishing about them."

The key breakthrough in tracing the diversion of funds came on Monday in Paris when Albert A. Hakim, an Iranian-American businessman, provided a team of Congressional investigators with documents, including Swiss bank records, giving details about the transactions, a Congressional staff assistant said. Mr. Hakim, a business partner of Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, is thought to have arranged many of the financial transactions behind the arms sales to Iran and the contra supply program.

Mr. Hakim's documents provided the first independent evidence about the diversion since Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d disclosed last November that a diversion of profits had taken place. Neither the Senate Intelligence Committee, which investigated the matter in December, nor the Tower Commission, which reported in February, was able to confirm the diversion.

Evidence of Military Involvement

The new evidence of involvement of American military personnel in helping the covert contra supply program came from interviews Congressional investigators had with American officers and enlisted men in Central America during the last few weeks, one legislator said. During the interviews, the soldiers indicated they believed they were carrying out Mr. Reagan's policy.

Some of the Army officers are expected to be called to testify when the joint House and Senate special committees begin to hold hearings May 5.

One American sergeant related that he had regularly provided aviation fuel to planes used by the private resupply network when they landed at the airbase where he was stationed. "I don't ask whose plane it is," the sergeant said. "My job is to fill it up and get it out again."

The sergeant, like a number of other American military personnel inter-

viewed in Honduras and El Salvador, said he believed he was following orders in refueling the planes used by the private network.

In trying to trace the \$10 million donation from Sultan Hassan al-Bolkiah of Brunei, the committees have run into a blind alley, according to an official familiar with the investigation.

The money was solicited by Mr. Abrams in July 1986 at a time when funds appropriated earlier by Con-

gress for the contras ran out, according to his testimony to the Tower Commission. Mr. Abrams then asked both Colonel North and the Central Intelligence Agency official in charge of Central America for the numbers of bank accounts where the money could be sent.

The C.I.A. officer suggested an account in the Bahamas, while Colonel North gave him the number of a secret account in Geneva, Mr. Abrams testified. Thinking that Colonel North's account was "kind of cleaner," he then transmitted its number to Brunei.

The official knowledgeable about the inquiry said the lawmakers had concluded that the most likely explanation for the missing funds was that Mr. Abrams had made an error in the number, and that the funds ended up in another, unknown account.

The lawmakers say, however, that there is also a possibility that the Sultan did not really send the \$10 million.

Mr. Abrams did not return phone calls today for comment.